

# Children's Mental Health Awareness Week - May 2020

*Help spread mental health awareness and develop family engagement with your community.*

As today's crisis is putting stress on people everywhere and families are taking the lead with their children's learning, the family connection component for the annual Children's Mental Health Awareness Campaign is more relevant than ever. Mental health impacts how we think, feel, and act, including how a child: feels about himself/herself, relates to other children and adults and handles change, stress and other life situations.

Please join the Howard County Office of Children and Families' campaign and participate in five days of engaging activities with your preschool child. Now is a great time to learn social emotional skills in fun ways that can assist in their healthy development. Sign up for free, [here](#).

## Children's Mental Health Awareness Week is May 4-8, 2020

Now in its fifth year, we encourage more people to get involved and spread the word for this year's campaign, Boosting Social Connections While Physically Distancing. We are hoping that you can still be a conduit to connecting the information to your family populations. Your participation in the campaign encourages a stigma free environment which can empower families to feel comfortable accessing help they may need now and in the future. Early awareness highlights the importance of caring for every child's mental health and reinforces that positive mental health is essential to a child's healthy development.

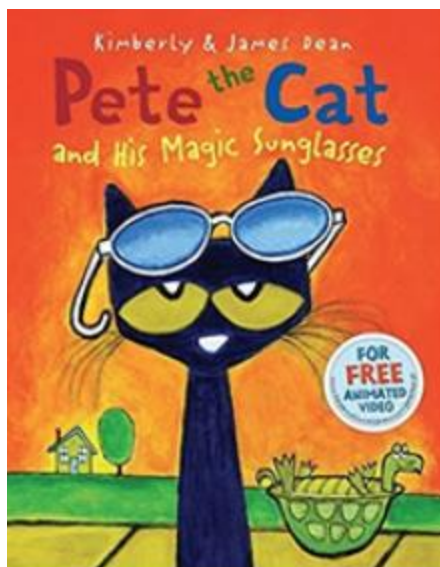
Our themes for this year: Positive Thinking/ Optimism, Building Social Connections at Home/ Friendship Skills, Mindfulness, Color Your World with Kindness, and The Power of Play.

To find additional ideas, visit the [May Mental Health Activity Calendar](#). Downloadable resources for mental health information can be found at [Children's Mental Health Matters](#) or to find specific [COVID- 19 Coping Resources](#).

If you have questions or need assistance to find local information, call Howard County's Free Information and Referral CARE Line at 410-313-2273.

## DAY 1 – Positive Thinking

**Image**



We have all heard the saying, "look on the bright side." But did you know our brains are hardwired to focus on the negative? With some extra effort we can change our way of thinking. Positive thinking is a powerful tool that can improve your health, help you manage stress, overcome challenges, and make better choices. The idea is that by changing our way of thinking, we can control our emotions and our actions.

As parents, there's plenty we can do to help our children develop a more positive attitude about themselves and their world! Listen to this read-aloud of [Pete And His Magic Sunglasses](#) with your child and then engage them in the following activities:

1. Discuss the emotions that Pete and his friends experienced throughout the story: grumpy, sad, mad, and frustrated. Ask your child to think of times that they felt this way- share your experience too!
2. Ask your child what happened when Pete put on his magic sunglasses and help them understand the power of positive thinking. Have your child create their own pair of magic sunglasses – [Click here](#) for step-by-step instructions and a free downloadable template.
3. Visit the Pete the Cat website to find [additional activities](#).

As Owl says, "Remember to look for the good in every day."

Additional Resources for Parents:

Watch this short TED Talk to understand more about Positive Thinking and leave with [A Simple Trick to Improve Positive Thinking](#).

Start your day off on a positive note with these [101 Positive Affirmations for Kids!](#)

## **DAY 2 – Building Friendship Skills at Home**

**Image**



Children start to make friends and build relationships with their peers in preschool. This is also the age when they start to learn friendship skills, such as sharing and taking turns.

With recent school closures and social distancing, it is increasingly difficult for children to connect with others and build appropriate social skills. So how can parents continue to support children building and developing friendships?

There are a variety of ways to shape children's' views of friendship and age-appropriate social skills for when a return to traditional face-to-face interactions.

Watch the Sesame street video, [Lets Be Friends](#), together with your child. Talk about characteristics that make a good friend. You can have your child draw pictures of ways they can be a good friend and create their own storybook! Continue to talk about and practice these skills with your child through everyday activities. Here are some ways you can support your child's development of appropriate friendship skills at home:

1. Model and discuss your own social behaviors. By modeling positive, friendly behaviors you can guide your children to do the same. Mention how you use kind words, share, and help others- just like with friends at school!
2. Teach New Skills. We need to continue to teach new skills, so they know what to do and what to expect. Here are some [friendship visuals](#) outlining specific steps to teach skills such as getting a friend's attention, sharing, and asking for toys.
3. Create opportunities to practice skills. Choose activities that allows them to practice many social skills such as sharing, turn taking and problem solving.
4. Use Role Play. Act out common scenarios with your child. This will help them to develop their way of thinking and give them the skills to handle various social situations.
5. Read Books about friendship. Here is a [book list](#) to support you in opening discussion

about friendship. Talk about the characters, their feelings and the outcomes. 6. Provide Encouragement. When you see your child engaging in positive social skills, praise them! This encourages children to continue using those skills.

### Image



## DAY 3 – Mindfulness

During these unprecedented times, it is hard to remember to take the time for not only self-care, but to also help your children to process and make sense of the world around them. Helping your child remain positive and being able to see the world through a positive lens is a trait that will help them to adjust to difficult times and throughout their lives.

Growth Mindset is the ability to view the world positively. It is the ability to develop resiliency and the confidence to not be afraid of challenges and failure. Children need to understand that without hard work and perseverance, they will not learn and grow. It is up to the adults to teach children resilience.

A powerful component of resiliency is mindfulness. Mindfulness is an ability to ground oneself, focus on the present and be aware. One of the most effective and fun techniques to do with your child is Belly Breathing. It reduces our heart rate and triggers a relaxation response. It slows us down.

First watch the Sesame Street Belly Breathing video, [here](#), then follow PBS's step by step guide:

1. Introduce belly breathing when you and your child are already relaxed so that your child can build awareness of what being calm feels like. Once your child has the feeling of belly breathing mastered (have her practice it daily), she can apply it to stressful moments.
2. Start by having your child breathe normally. Ask if your child notices anything about it. What parts of the body move as she breathes? What does it feel like?
3. Now have your child lie on her back, relax her muscles and place her hands on her belly.

4. With her mouth closed, have her breathe in for four seconds or until she feels her whole chest fill with air, all the way down to her belly. (Place a small object like a stuffed animal on their belly to help monitor the exercise)
5. Have your child hold in the air for four seconds.
6. Have your child slowly blow the air out until it's all gone. If your child is having difficulty breathing slowly, have her exhale through a straw. You can tell your child to pretend she's snorkeling.
7. Repeat until the body feels relaxed. Ask your child if they notice anything different from before. What does it feel like?
8. Include belly breathing as a regular part of your child's routine, such as bedtime. With practice, it can become a familiar strategy that your child can use at any age. For more information, visit the full article at [PBS](#).

To learn more about Mindfulness and Growth Mindset, visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ppOup8fp4E>

<https://leftbrainbuddha.com/>

<https://www.pbs.org/parents/crafts-and-experiments/practice-mindfulness-with-belly-breathing>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=scqFHGI\\_nZE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=scqFHGI_nZE)

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## **DAY 4 – The Power of Play**

Staying at home provides the perfect opportunity to focus on building connection with our children. One of the greatest ways we can build connection is through play. While play is natural for kids, it can actually be quite difficult for adults.

Often, we are too busy, feel uncomfortable being silly or just don't know how to engage in the kind of play our kids really enjoy. But did you know that play isn't just fun? It's also a powerful tool to build connection. Check out the video below to see this in action.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RCxNtQ-t4M>

Today's challenge is to spend time playing with your child-get on the floor, be silly and have fun together. Adding even a small amount of quality play time into your daily routine will build a strong connection, positive emotions (for you and your child) and wonderful memories. For more ideas, visit Sesame Street's, [Power of Play](#). Remember play is powerful so give it a try today!

## **DAY 5 – Kindness**

How can we show kindness during these unique times? Watch this [video](#) with your child, then work together to create a list of ways to “color your world with kindness.” One small act of kindness can lead to many more!

Below are some ideas to get your list started.

- Write a letter (or draw a picture) and send it to a family member.
- Call a friend and tell them why they are special to you.
- Video chat with a grandparent and ask them about when they were little.
- Leave a nice note in a neighbor's mailbox.
- Share a toy with a sibling.
- Help mom put away the groceries.

To learn more, watch [The Science of Kindness](#). Don't forget that you, as the parent, can spread the kindness to your kids too. Tell them when they are making good choices, spend extra time playing together, leave a kind card ([click here](#)) somewhere for them to find, make their favorite dinner or have an ice-cream party!

Even during these challenging times, there are still many ways to color our world with kindness. Get started today!